

# **College and Career Readiness for Nevada Students**

Task Force Report

## Introduction

This Task Force Report was compiled by the West Comprehensive Center and Nevada Department of Education. The contents of the report reflect the work of the College and Career Readiness Task Force, convened by the Superintendent of Public Instruction under the direction of the State Board of Education.

The Report is to provide recommendations for defining and setting standards and accountability measures for college and career readiness for all high school students in Nevada. Once finalized, the report will be shared with the State Board of Education and stakeholder groups as needed.

## Acknowledgements

Careful consideration was given to the selection of the task force members, recognizing that representation was needed from the following stakeholder groups: business and industry, secondary education, higher education, school boards, economic development, workforce development, the Department of Education and the State Board of Education. The following task force members attended multiple meetings, reviewed documents, and, most important, presented valuable viewpoints representative of their career areas and/or constituents.

Crystal Abba, *Vice Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education*

William Anderson, *Chief Economist, Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation*

Valorie Bringle, *Instructor Del Webb Middle School, Clark County School District*

Stavan Corbett, *Past President, Nevada State Board of Education*

Ryan Costella, *Director of Strategic Initiatives, Click Bond, Inc.*

Stan Hall, *Director of Career and Technical Education, Clark County School District*

Dave Jensen, *Superintendent, Humboldt County School District*

Steven Laden, *Financial Advisor, Wells Fargo Advisors*

Bryn Lapenta, *Senior Director for Accountability, Washoe County School District*

Scott Lommori, *Director of Testing and Educational Technology, Lyon County School District*

Jim Pfrommer, *Owner, Pfrommer and McCune Public Accountants*

Mike Raponi, *Director of Career, Technical and Adult Education, Department of Education*

Charles Shirley, *Member, Lyon County School Board of Trustees*

Mike Spangler, *Dean of Applied Technologies, College of Southern Nevada*

William Speer, *Interim Dean, College of Education, University of Las Vegas*

Karen Taycher, *Executive Director, Nevada PEP*

Richard Vineyard, *Assistant Director, Assessments & Program Accountability, Department of Education*

Project Facilitator: Sheila Arredondo, *WestEd Policy Center and West Comprehensive Center*

## **Report Contents:**

- I. Overview
  - A. Background and Charge
  - B. Approach and Activities
- II. Defining Readiness
  - A. Audiences for This Work
  - B. Basis for the Definition
- III. Standards and Indicators
  - A. Guiding Principles and Terminology
  - B. Recommended Standards
  - C. Potential Measures and Indicators (student level)
  - D. Evidence of Success (system level)
- IV. Recommendations for Action
  - A. Adopt the Readiness Definition
  - B. Endorse the Six Standards
  - C. Seek Stakeholder Input on the Indicators
  - D. Develop a Readiness Framework
  - E. Disseminate the Information
- V. Implications for Nevada's Education System
  - A. Assessment
  - B. Curriculum and Instruction
  - C. Student Supports
  - D. Professional Learning
  - E. Data Systems
- VI. Conclusion

## Part I. Overview

### A. Background and Charge

Nevada's initial work to develop standards and indicators for college and career readiness resulted in the establishment of regulations in 2010 that included a definition, standards and indicators of readiness for college. Specifically, the resulting regulatory guidance in Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 389.835 provided standards for college readiness whereby students who took the necessary coursework to earn an advanced diploma and two years of foreign language would be college ready or more apt to succeed in college without remediation.

In 2012, the Superintendent of Public Instruction sought input from the Career and Technical Education Advisory Council to provide initial guidance to define and set accountability measures for career readiness. The Advisory Council consisted of a broad representative group of stakeholders, primarily from economic development, workforce development, and education. The Superintendent presented information at two meetings; the initial recommendation from the Advisory Council was to develop combined definitions and standards for college and career readiness. Thereafter, the Superintendent, with the support of the State Board of Education, formed the Career Readiness Task Force.

The initial goal of the Task Force was to draft regulatory language to define and set accountability measures for career readiness to complement the existing regulatory language for college readiness.

### B. Approach and Activities

After two meetings, the Task Force determined that drafting regulatory language for career readiness, to complement the existing regulatory language for college readiness, was not the best starting point. The Task Force reconvened at a later date with a neutral facilitator from the West Comprehensive Center to help guide a more thorough process that began with establishing guiding principles for college and career readiness. The Task Force then developed recommended standards and potential measures and indicators that would meet those standards, as detailed in the following sections. With established standards, "menus" of measures and indicators were developed to accommodate multiple paths for students to meet the standards.

It is important to note that a collaborative, work-session environment enabled all Task Force members to fully participate, express varying viewpoints, and reach consensus on the meaning of college and career readiness.

## Part II. Defining Readiness

After considerable and thoughtful deliberation, the Task Force recommends the following definition for college and career readiness:

*College and career readiness means the pupil who graduates from high school demonstrates the foundational knowledge, skills, and qualities to succeed, without remediation, in workforce training, certification, and degree programs.*

### **A. Audiences for this Work**

Clearly articulating definitions, standards, and measures and indicators for college and career readiness is important for a broad audience base. Students, parents, teachers, government leaders, business and industry, and more, must be informed about what college and career readiness means and how the State will implement standards and measures to best prepare students. Great care is needed to ensure expectations are meaningful and clearly articulated.

As stated by the National High School Center in its report *Defining College and Career Readiness: A Resource Guide* (2012, p. 4), “Although the phrase ‘college and career readiness’ has become increasingly popular among federal, state and local education agencies as well as a number of foundations and professional organizations, it can be challenging to define precisely.” The Center further recommends that “users should note differences (among the myriad of definitions) and be careful to formulate definitions that meet their local context.”

### **B. Basis for the Definition**

The definition recommended by the Task Force recognizes that post-high school education and training, at varying levels, are needed for students to find success in most careers. The inclusion of workforce training and certifications, in addition to degree programs, supports this premise. The definition further recognizes that foundational knowledge, skills, and qualities — from problem solving and teamwork skills to personal qualities such as adaptability and a strong work ethic — are equally important to support student readiness. These three areas, foundational knowledge, skills, and qualities provide the organizational structure for the measures and indicators in the following section.

## **Part III. Standards and Indicators**

This section includes the principles that the Task Force used to guide its work, definitions of commonly used terms, recommended college- and career-readiness standards, and potential indicators associated with the standards.

### **A. Guiding Principles and Terminology**

Task Force members agreed that Nevada’s college and career readiness definition, standards, and indicators should meet the following criteria:

1. Promote student success.
2. Apply to all students.
3. Be meaningful to students and families.
4. Build on broad public and private consensus.

The Task Force checked its work against these principles to reach consensus on the definition, standards, and indicators.

Standards, as described in this report, are clear statements of what students should know, understand, and be able to do upon graduating from high school. Standards establish goals for student learning. As indicated in the guiding principles, these common expectations apply to all students and should promote student success.

Curriculum encompasses the content taught in courses or the “what” of learning. Instruction focuses on the “how” or the strategies and mechanisms that educators use to share, deliver, and facilitate student learning.

Indicators are signs or evidence that high school graduates have met the standards. Various assessments, such as tests and performances, are often used to measure students’ knowledge and skills with the scores obtained serving as evidence of mastery. Assessments can help educators determine how much or how well a student has learned the curriculum, and whether standards have been achieved.

## **B. Recommended Standards**

The Task Force identified six college and career readiness standards for Nevada students. These standards clearly state what students should know, understand, and be able to do as a result of completing their secondary education. The standards represent the knowledge, skills, and qualities that Nevada students should strive to develop and demonstrate by the time that they graduate from high school.

1. Students demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, and science.
2. Students demonstrate proficiency in digital literacy.<sup>1</sup>
3. Students know and understand the specific content knowledge applicable to one or more career pathways.
4. Students demonstrate cultural competency.
5. Students demonstrate critical thinking, teamwork, problem solving, communication, and technical skills.
6. Students exhibit the characteristics of a lifelong learner by demonstrating qualities including but not limited to:
  - a. Adaptability and flexibility,
  - b. Independence and personal responsibility,
  - c. Intellectual curiosity and perseverance,
  - d. Acknowledging diverse perspectives, and
  - e. A strong work ethic.

## **C. Potential Measures and Indicators**

Indicators provide valid and meaningful evidence that a graduate has met the standards. And while the standards apply to all students, the indicators may vary given the diversity of pathways and options that students pursue. Thus the Task Force decided to create a menu of potential measures and indicators organized by knowledge, skills, and qualities. These menus suggest numerous methods in which students could demonstrate or exhibit their readiness for college and careers. In addition to standardized, criterion-, and norm-referenced exams and test scores, some qualitative indicators are listed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Students use technology and digital media strategically and capably. Students use technological tools to retrieve information, create, collaborate, and communicate.

Table 1. Measures and Indicators of Student Knowledge

Knowledge	Measures and Indicators (Evidence)
Reading Writing Mathematics Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accuplacer Exam scores (i.e., reading, writing, mathematics)</li> <li>▪ ACT College Readiness benchmark scores (18 for English composition, 22 for college algebra, 24 for biology)</li> <li>▪ Advanced Diploma</li> <li>▪ Advanced Placement Exam scores (i.e., 3, 4, 5)</li> <li>▪ CLEP Exam scores</li> <li>▪ End-of-course exam scores</li> <li>▪ Grade 11 Smarter Balanced Exam scores (English/language arts and mathematics)</li> <li>▪ International Baccalaureate Diploma</li> <li>▪ SAT scores (reading, writing, mathematics)</li> <li>▪ SAT subject test scores</li> <li>▪ Performance on Nevada Alternate Assessment (reading, mathematics, science)*</li> <li>▪ Attainment of Individual Education Program (IEP) goals for reading, mathematics, science*</li> <li>▪ Attainment of a graduation diploma or completion document by age 22*</li> <li>▪ Capstone project for reading, math or science*</li> </ul>
Digital Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A Plus Certification</li> <li>▪ Cisco Certification</li> <li>▪ ETS iCritical Thinking Certification</li> <li>▪ Internet and Computing Core Certification</li> <li>▪ WorkKeys Locating Information test score</li> <li>▪ Demonstrated competence in appropriate use of social networks*</li> <li>▪ Demonstrated competence in use of adaptive or assistive technology* for academic or career purposes</li> <li>▪ Digital résumé or student work sample of reading, math or science project*</li> <li>▪ Video interview using script*</li> <li>▪ Digital student portfolio featuring student's best work*</li> </ul>
Career Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ASVAB Score (36–39)</li> <li>▪ Passing score on a CTE content assessment</li> <li>▪ Passing score on an industry certificate</li> <li>▪ Passing score on the Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment</li> <li>▪ WorkKeys test scores (e.g., reading for information, applied technology, and business writing tests)</li> <li>▪ Career plan</li> <li>▪ Clinicals, internships, job shadowing, or work experience</li> <li>▪ Mock interviewing and résumés</li> <li>▪ Career and technical student organization membership (e.g. DECA, FBLA, FCCLA, FFA, HOSA, SkillsUSA)</li> <li>▪ Use of college and career resources</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Worksite visits</li> <li>▪ Career and academic plan supporting post-secondary success*</li> <li>▪ School-to-work experiences including transition experiences*</li> <li>▪ Post-secondary exploration experiences*</li> <li>▪ Demonstrated competence in daily living skills*</li> <li>▪ Demonstrated competence in occupational skills (e.g., specific job tasks, work samples, work habits)*</li> <li>▪ Self-determination*</li> </ul>
Cultural Competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advanced Placement Exam scores (e.g., Human Geography; Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and/or Spanish Language and Culture)</li> <li>▪ CLEP Exam scores</li> <li>▪ SAT subject test scores</li> <li>▪ Travel abroad experiences, reports, and presentations</li> <li>▪ Participation in extracurricular and community events*</li> <li>▪ Community service project or relationship*</li> <li>▪ Demonstrated competency in personal and social skills*</li> <li>▪ Focused partnership with mentor or with peer*</li> </ul>

\* *Menu of indicators for the one percent of special education students who have significant cognitive disabilities; the addition of these indicators was recommended by the Department of Education.*

Table 2. Measures and Indicators of Student Skills

Skills	Measures and Indicators (Evidence)
Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ End-of-program technical assessments</li> <li>▪ Workplace readiness assessments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ WorkKeys test scores (e.g., applied mathematics, locating information, teamwork, and workplace observation)</li> <li>○ Passing score on the Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Inquiry-based experiments and investigations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Presentations of experimental research</li> <li>○ Presentations of original research</li> <li>○ Engineering, robotics and science fair entries</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extracurricular activities (e.g., speech and debate, athletics, fine and performing arts)</li> <li>○ Group projects</li> <li>○ Service learning opportunities</li> <li>○ Student leadership organizations (e.g., DECA, student government)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Capstone courses, culminating projects, and senior theses</li> <li>▪ Inventions and marketing plans</li> <li>▪ Letters of recommendation</li> <li>▪ Peer reviews</li> </ul>
Problem Solving	
Teamwork	
Communication	
Technical	



Table 3. Measures and Indicators of Student Qualities

Qualities	Measures and Indicators (Evidence)
Adaptability and Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Academic and career plans</li> <li>▪ Consistently complete tasks and assignments on time</li> <li>▪ Independent study and research</li> <li>▪ Internships and work experience</li> <li>▪ Interviews</li> <li>▪ Letters of recommendation</li> <li>▪ Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extracurricular activities</li> <li>○ Group projects</li> <li>○ Service learning opportunities</li> <li>○ Student leadership organizations</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Peer reviews</li> <li>▪ Personal health and wellness plan</li> <li>▪ Self reflections</li> <li>▪ Use of college and career resources</li> <li>▪ WorkKeys test scores (e.g., fit, listening for understanding, performance, talent)</li> </ul>
Independence and Personal Responsibility	
Intellectual Curiosity and Perseverance	
Acknowledging Diverse Perspectives	
Strong Work Ethic	

As the Task Force considered potential measures and indicators, it recognized the need to articulate selection criteria. Criteria for selecting college and career readiness indicators follow:

- Provide evidence of both academic and CTE proficiency
- Driven by longitudinal data
- Portable
- Quantifiable<sup>2</sup>
- Recognized nationally by industry and institutions of higher education
- Validated by a third party
- Valued in the marketplace and by higher education

#### D. Evidence of Success

The measures and indicators listed in the previous section provide examples of how students might demonstrate their readiness for postsecondary studies and the workplace. A different set of indicators would be needed to provide evidence of success at the system level. The State already collects and publicly reports many system level indicators. Such indicators generally include disaggregated state testing data; secondary dropout and graduation rates; postsecondary enrollment, remediation, and persistence; program participation and completion; certificate and degree attainment as well as employability and workforce entrance statistics. Both student-level and system-level indicators should be tracked to document progress and drive improvement.

<sup>2</sup> The State and/or districts may need to develop evaluation criteria and rubrics for non-standardized measures.

## **Part IV. Recommendations for Action**

As noted previously, the Task Force was charged with defining college and career readiness and identifying associated standards and indicators. Based upon research, structured exploratory activities, and ongoing dialogues, the Task Force makes the following recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education:

### **Adopt the Readiness Definition**

The Task Force reached consensus that students need to develop a core set of knowledge, skills, and qualities to successfully pursue a variety of postsecondary options. This notion is communicated by adopting the following broad definition of readiness:

College and career readiness means the pupil who graduates from high school demonstrates the foundational knowledge, skills, and qualities to succeed, without remediation, in workforce training, certification, and degree programs.

### **Endorse the Six Standards**

The standards explicate the readiness definition. They make it concrete by detailing the specific academic and career knowledge, personal and social skills, and desired behaviors and qualities that high school graduates should demonstrate. By adopting the definition and endorsing the standards, the State will establish a vision for college and career readiness for Nevada Students.

### **Seek Stakeholder Input on the Indicators**

The Task Force believes that more time should be spent identifying, vetting, and selecting potential indicators for the three key areas of knowledge, skills, and qualities. A process similar to the one followed by the Task Force could be conducted regionally or during scheduled events to seek stakeholder input and build consensus on key indicators.

### **Develop a Readiness Framework**

Charge a subsequent working group with drafting a college and career readiness framework that is built upon the standards. The purpose of the framework would be to communicate why students need to be prepared for college and the workplace, what they should know and be able to do, opportunities for developing readiness, and how they will know they are ready (e.g., products that students could offer as evidence of readiness).

The framework might include the following items:

- A rationale for why students need to be ready for college and a career (e.g., employment projections and statistics).
- An inventory or examples of pathways and opportunities for students to develop readiness that are organized by the six standards or standard areas.
- A menu of measures, assessment benchmarks, and indicators for students to demonstrate their readiness.
- Evaluation criteria and/or rubrics for non-standardized indicators.

The work of developing a readiness framework provides an opportunity to facilitate collaboration among business, communities, families, and educators while promoting a common vision for college and career readiness.

### **Disseminate the Information**

Ensure that students understand what it means to be ready for life after high school. Make the college and career readiness information and framework available to students, parents, families, educators, employers, and other interested parties in various formats and through multiple mechanisms. Task Force members and their colleagues could serve as champions for college and career readiness by sharing the information with their networks, communicating key messages, and building commitment toward the vision.

## **Part V. Implications for Nevada's Education System**

Key elements of the State's education system may need to be reviewed, reconsidered, and better aligned if educators and communities are to help students develop and successfully demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and qualities described in the college and career readiness standards. Some of these elements are discussed below briefly. Please note the elements and recommendations are general and may need refinement to include more specific content relative to Nevada.

### **Assessment**

The State could encourage the use of currently available college and career readiness assessment tools and affirm the benchmark scores derived from these tools as indicators of college and career readiness until new assessments are made available through the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. The State could also facilitate the adoption, creation, or refinement of rubrics for student products, performances, and portfolios prompting movement toward a competency-based education system that recognizes mastery rather than seat time.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Districts may elect to conduct audits of their P–12 curricula. The State could facilitate this process by identifying criteria related to alignment with standards, coherence, completeness, rigor, relevance, quality, and utility. Districts could use the audit results to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to master challenging content and pursue their interests. Additional ways to customize content, redesign instructional practices, tailor experiences, and personalize learning might be considered. Opportunities to earn college credit, such as advanced placement and dual enrollment, and participate in career-related experiences, such as internships and mentorships, could be evaluated and adjusted.

### **Student Supports**

Students need the supports necessary to demonstrate college and career readiness, graduate from high school, and transition successfully into postsecondary studies and the workplace. Supports and services may include guidance and counseling; career and college exploration, planning, and assistance; tutoring, mentoring, shadowing, and coaching; comprehensive health and wellness programs; and incentives, scholarships, and financial aid. Rethinking the necessary student supports and ensuring access to individualized services provides an opportunity to integrate business and community partners in the work and better leverage existing resources.

### **Professional Learning**

Educators at all levels of the system will benefit from evidence-based, job-embedded professional learning opportunities that deepen their knowledge, strengthen skills, address the effective use of time, and help them apply technology in more meaningful ways. Support and time are essential for collaboration and dialogue across grade levels, grade spans, content areas, and sectors if educators are to design and deliver opportunities tailored to meet student needs.

### **Data Systems**

To achieve the college and career readiness standards students will need a place where they can set and update goals, prepare and refine plans, track progress, and document results. The State could promote student use of the Nevada Career Information System, encourage districts to purchase other commercially available college and career information systems, and fund an electronic portfolio system. The State may also need to assess the capacity of its data warehouse and systems to support the data collection, analysis, and reporting necessary for successful implementation of the college and career readiness standards.

## **Conclusion**

While college and career readiness is a widely shared goal and often the objective of high school redesign, confusion still exists over what it actually means. The Task Force concluded that readiness for college and readiness for a career are one and the same. To be successful in life after high school, students need to develop a core set of knowledge, skills, and qualities. Therefore the Task Force makes the following recommendations to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education:

1. Adopt the Readiness Definition
2. Endorse the Six Standards
3. Seek Stakeholder Input on the Indicators
4. Develop a Readiness Framework
5. Disseminate the Information

By implementing these recommendations the State of Nevada will establish clear, high expectations for students; promote a shared vision of college and career readiness; and provide an umbrella for making sense of recent education reforms such as Common Core State Standards, new assessments, educator evaluation, support for struggling schools, and changes to the accountability system.